

The Role of Social Support and Professional Identity in the Development of Preservice Special Education Teachers in Kuwait

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**مجلة الدراسات التربوية والانسانية . كلية التربية . جامعة دمنهور
المجلد السادس عشر، العدد الرابع (أكتوبر) – الجزء الأول، لسنة 2024م**

دور الهوية المهنية والدعم الاجتماعي في تطوير معلمي التربية الخاصة قبل الخدمة في دولة الكويت

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الملخص

تستكشف هذه الدراسة العلاقة بين الدعم الاجتماعي وهوية المعلمين المهنية لمعلمي التربية الخاصة قبل الخدمة في الكويت. تركز الدراسة على أنواع الدعم ومصادره وتأثيرها على هوية المعلمين المهنية ومسيرتهم. تم استخدام المنهج الكمي cross-sectional وتم جمع البيانات من 250 مشاركًا باستخدام استبانة. تعكس النتائج دعمًا قويًا من أعضاء قسم التربية الخاصة والعائلات والأقران، حيث تشير إلى أن دعم الأسرة هو أقوى عامل مؤثر في تطوير شعور الالتزام والشغف بالمهنة. بينما أظهرت دعم الأقران تباينات تشير إلى الحاجة إلى معالجة وتعزيز مشاعر الانتماء لديهم. ومن خلال استخدام تحليل العوامل، تم تحديد بعدين رئيسيين لهوية المعلم المهنية: "الالتزام والشغف بالتربية الخاصة" و"المعتقدات والفهم الأخلاقي في التربية الخاصة"، وهذان البعدان يمثلان القيم الثقافية المحلية. تختتم الدراسة بتوصيات عملية تهدف إلى تعزيز الدعم لمعلمي التربية الخاصة قبل الخدمة، مما يُحسن التدريب والتحضير المهني والبيئة التعليمية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الدعم الاجتماعي - الهوية المهنية - تربية خاصة.

Abstract

This study investigates the association between social support and professional identity of preservice special education teachers in Kuwait. The study focuses on the types of support, sources, and their influence on teachers' professional identity and career. A quantitative cross-sectional approach was adopted, and data were gathered from 250 participants using a questionnaire. The results reflect very strong support from the Special Education Department, families, and peers. They point to family support as the strongest influential factor in developing a sense of commitment and passion for the profession. Peer support demonstrated variations which indicate a need for addressing and fostering feelings of belonging. By using factor analysis, two major dimensions of professional identity were identified: "Commitment and Passion for Special Education" and "Beliefs and Ethical Understanding in Special Education." These dimensions are representative of local cultural values. The study concludes with practical recommendations aimed at strengthening support for preservice special education teachers. Specifically, better training and professional preparation can enhance the achievement of students and the educational environment.

Keywords: Social Support; Professional Identity; Special Education.

The Role of Social Support and Professional Identity in the Development of Preservice Special Education Teachers in Kuwait

Social support is a substantial factor that shapes professional identity among preservice special education teachers. It involves support from teachers, family members, and peers and is essential for enhancing teacher confidence and commitment. Also, it helps teachers to increase their performance and consequently conduct their role effectively to navigate all the challenges within special education (Alpaslan et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2020).

The professional identity of special education teachers refers to teachers' beliefs, self-perceptions, and perceived competence and commitment. It is very instrumental for better performance and overcoming the challenges related to special education. Indeed, a well-developed professional identity makes sure that the needs of the special education students are handled by the teachers with flexibility and efficiency. Building on personal identity, thus, needs to be informed by robust mechanisms of social support to guarantee success as a strategy within special education (Ulubey et al., 2018).

Social Support

Social support is understood as psychological and emotional resources provided for individuals through their social networks (Permatasari et al., 2021). It is a foundation for effective learning and personal development through guidance, encouragement, and collaboration (Alpaslan et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2020; Lei et al., 2018). Social support can be provided by teachers, family members, and peers.

Teacher support includes academic advice, positive feedback, and comfortable, open communication. This level and type of support significantly builds up the students' competence and confidence, thus improving academic and emotional outcomes. Students who receive strong support from teachers achieve higher levels of academic achievement and a stronger sense of belonging in their particular learning setting or community. Lei et al. (2018) conducted a meta-analysis that examined how teacher support is related to students' positive and negative academic emotions, taking into consideration moderating influences of student characteristics such as culture, age, and gender. Their statistical meta-analysis included 65 studies with 58,368 students; the findings indicated that a strong correlation exists between teacher support and improved academic emotions (Lei et al., 2018).

Family support—as manifested by the endorsement of educational and career choices and the provision of emotional encouragement—serves to influence the success and performance of students in terms of their continued persistence in pursuing academic goals. At this level, students are able to focus on their academic goals. Also, emotional support, such as active listening and encouragement, from

family members serves to nurture resilience in students and enhance their capability to respond appropriately to academic pressures and stresses (Permatasari et al., 2021).

Peer support involves collaboration among students during academic projects, establishing a feeling of community, and supporting each other within group activities. A more cooperative environment reinforces social interactions even more and encourages the acquisition of relevant skills of teamwork and problem-solving. Hence, cooperation and positive social relationships with peers are associated with better academic success and an increased sense of belonging among the students. Putri and Nursanti (2020) determined how peer social support is related to academic resilience among young adult migrant students who face barriers both academically and psychosocially. According to the findings, higher scores of support from peers are associated with increased academic resilience, suggesting the importance of peer relationships in the success of these students.

Professional Identity in Special Education

Professional identity in special education encompasses a number of significant components, which relate closely to the commitment and personal dedication of individuals toward working with students with disabilities. These elements manifest to provide great impacts on the quality of education and the learning environment in general (Hong, 2024).

First and foremost, commitment to the profession of special education reflects one's genuine passion and desire to work with students with disabilities. Such commitment, in turn, enhances professional effectiveness and promotes job retention in special education. Second, beliefs about special education play a pivotal role. Among these are beliefs that all students, even those with disabilities, can learn and achieve. Surprisingly, such beliefs give paramount importance to designing supportive and inclusive learning environments tailored to the needs of students with disabilities.

Third, a sense of competence is an important factor as well. It is mainly defined as the belief of individuals over their capacity to positively influence their professional field. Such a belief can help build individual confidence in dealing with challenges regarding education as well as collaborating with parents and other teachers. Furthermore, an emotional connection to the role of special education is significant. This connection involves the satisfaction and sense of accomplishment that both teachers and students feel when they positively impact the lives of students with disabilities. Understanding roles and responsibilities in special education involves an understanding of the ethical and legal commitments related to putting in place inclusive and supportive learning environments. This responsibility involves developing teaching approaches that are consistent with students' needs and aligned with legal and ethical standards (Akerson et al., 2014; Hong, 2024).

The interplay between these aspects of professional identity—commitment, beliefs, sense of competence, emotional connection, and understanding of roles and responsibilities—shapes the effectiveness of special education practices. Each one of these influences the others in offering quality education and promoting a supportive learning environment for students with disabilities (Alpaslan et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2020; Akerson et al., 2014).

The Relationship Between Social Support and Professional Identity

Social support provided by teachers, family, and peers plays a crucial role in the enhancement of students' academic achievement and establishes a supportive environment for learning. Such support also contributes to better mental health by providing social resources that help in coping with academic and social pressures. Hence, social support is an important component of students' well-being and success, which underlines the need for supportive and inclusive environments within educational and professional contexts.

The literature suggests that the relationship between preservice special education teachers' professional identity and social support is dynamic and multifaceted. Both factors influence each other, contributing to improved academic and emotional performance of students through a more positive learning environment. Aykac et al. (2017) mentioned that social settings affect the professional identity of a teacher. They identified several important factors: close social networks, previous educational experiences, teaching experiences, personal characteristics, characteristics related to professional aspects, and media influence. Moreover, Bacakoğlu (2018) determined that family and close environments have an important role in forming teacher identity. However, Soydaş (2020) emphasized the contribution of professional stakeholders to the development of teacher identity. Canrinus et al. (2012) discussed that other factors that affect teachers' professional identity include professional commitment, job satisfaction, and motivation.

Alpaslan et al. (2023) highlighted that teaching perceptions affect social support. They explained that teacher support is mainly associated with social status. Also, friend support is positively related to satisfaction, social status, and demand, while family support relates to the busy work aspect. Moreover, satisfaction with career choice influences all aspects of teacher identity, while career expertise and salary influence teacher participation only (Alpaslan et al., 2023).

Social support promotes professional identity by boosting a sense of competence for teachers. Chen et al. (2020) examined the role of social support in developing professional identity and academic self-efficacy (ASE) among Chinese preservice special education teachers. The results demonstrated a significant positive relationship in that the higher the perceived social support is, the greater the professional identity and the ASE become. Notably, professional identity fully

mediated the relationship between ASE and social support, underlining the fact that social support influences ASE through the impact on professional identity. Hong (2024) examined special education teachers' professional identity in China. The general level of professional identity was high, although significant differences existed in the linked factors such as leadership, marital status, educational background, teaching experience, and professional titles. Significant predictors for professional identity included school support and occupational stress (Hong, 2024).

In the same vein, Elwakil (2024) proved that perceived social support positively influences self-efficacy and attitudes to inclusive education, reinforcing the importance of taking social support into consideration in nurturing positive professional identities among future special education teachers in Egypt. Zhang and Guo (2023) found that perceived social support positively predicts professional identity, work engagement, and career calling. Specifically, they reported that work engagement and professional identity serve as mediators in the relationship between career calling and perceived social support. Based on this, one could infer that supportive social relationships enhance dedication and further clarify professional identity, leading to a sense of career calling.

In conclusion, these studies have established that social support is essential for establishing a special education teacher's professional identity and overall well-being. Among special education instructors, strong social support can significantly enhance professional identity, reduce burnout, and improve job satisfaction.

Statement of the Problem

Existing studies lack a comprehensive analysis of how the relationship between social support and professional identity affects teachers' performance and professional development. Therefore, the core issue is determining how both professional identity and social support influence the performance of preservice special education teachers and how these factors interact to shape their work experience and professional development in the State of Kuwait. This leads to the formulation of the study's research questions as follows:

1. What types and sources of social support are available to preservice special education teachers during their college education?
2. What are the key dimensions of professional identity among preservice special education teachers in Kuwait?
3. What is the correlation between social support (from teachers, family, and peers) and the professional identity of preservice special education teachers in Kuwait?
4. To what extent does social support (from teachers, family, and peers) predict professional commitment and emotional resilience among preservice special education teachers in Kuwait?

Significance of the Study

Theoretical Significance

This study enriches our understanding of the factors affecting professional achievement in the field of special education in Kuwait. It addresses a current gap in academic literature, enabling scholars and practitioners to develop more comprehensive theories about enhancing work environments in special education.

Practical Significance

These findings have provided practical insights that can help educational institutions and policymakers design training programs and social support strategies for teachers. This will better prepare the teachers to respond to work challenges, increase teacher devotion, and ensure job satisfaction, consequently providing quality educations for students with disabilities. The current study aims to improve the quality of special education by improving work conditions and increasing social support.

Methodology

Study Design

The research design of this study followed a quantitative cross-sectional method. The study examines data from a single point in time in an effort to study the relationships among the various factors (Gorsuch, 2014). Specifically, this study explores how social support influences the professional identity, career aspirations, and resilience of special education students. The findings of the study offer insights into effective support mechanisms that improve educational experiences and outcomes.

Participants

The respondents were selected from students who majored in special education at the College of Basic Education. Table 1 gives an overview of the characteristics of the 250 respondents who participated in the study. The majority of the respondents were females (74%, n=185) compared with 26% males (n=65), showing a remarkable gender imbalance that could be due to higher enrollment by females into the field. Most of the respondents were in their third year of study (54.8%, n=137), while the smaller proportions were in their second year (33.2%, n=83) and fourth year (12.0%, n=30). In terms of specializations, the majority of the students concentrate on Intellectual Disability (54.8%, n=137), followed by Giftedness and Talents (33.2%, n=83) and Learning Difficulties (12.0%, n=30).

Table 1: *Profile of the Respondents (N=250)*

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	65	26.0%
	Female	185	74.0%
Study Level	Second year	83	33.2%
	Third year	137	54.8%
	Fourth year	30	12.0%
Special Education Major	Giftedness and Talents	83	33.2%
	Intellectual Disability	137	54.8%
	Learning Difficulties	30	12.0%

Instrument

An online questionnaire was developed to investigate how social support influences the development of professional identity and career goals, both of which are vital for long-term success in special education. The questionnaire consisted of three sections: demographic questions, 10 closed-ended items assessing the three dimensions of social support, and 14 closed-ended items related to professional identity in special education. Participants were instructed to evaluate their perceptions using a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.”

Validity and Reliability

The validity and reliability of the questionnaire were ensured through several specific measures. Initially, comparable instruments from existing literature were reviewed, including studies by Alpaslan et al. (2023), Chen et al. (2020), Hong (2024), Meyer et al. (2023), and Zhang and Guo (2023). Subsequently, three experts in special education evaluated and provided feedback on the initial version of the questionnaire.

Regarding reliability, Table 2 displays the results of the reliability analysis for the questionnaire, focusing on the dimensions of social support and professional identity among special education students. The reliability of each dimension was measured using Cronbach’s Alpha Coefficient, a statistic commonly used to assess the internal consistency of a scale. Generally, a Cronbach’s Alpha value above .70 is considered acceptable, indicating that the items within each dimension reliably measure the same underlying construct (George & Mallery, 2016).

Table 2 : *Reliability of the questionnaire- Alpha Cronbach Coefficients*

Theme	Dimensions	Cronbach’s Alpha	N of Items
Social Support	Support from Teachers	.76	3
	Support from Family	.75	4
	Support from Peers	.83	3
Professional Identity	Commitment to the Profession of Special Education	.84	3

Theme	Dimensions	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
	Beliefs about Special Education and Inclusive Practices	.60	3
	Sense of Competence and Confidence in Special Education	.82	3
	Emotional Connection to the Role of Special Education	.78	2
	Expected Role and Responsibilities in Special Education	.79	3

Overall, the questionnaire exhibited strong reliability, supporting the validity of the findings, with most dimensions exceeding the acceptable threshold of .70. This confirms that the majority of the measures were reliable indicators of the underlying constructs they were intended to assess. The only exception was the “Beliefs about Special Education and Inclusive Practices” dimension, which recorded a Cronbach’s Alpha of .60. Although this indicates a moderate level of internal consistency, the outcome was considered acceptable. This is because it is common for Cronbach’s Alpha to fall below the acceptable threshold when the number of items per dimension is low. This situation frequently occurs when there are fewer than 10 items in a dimension (Pallant, 2013).

Rationale for Exploring professional Identity Dimensions

In the design of the present research, we considered the multiplicity of dimensions of professional identity as identified in the existing academic literature. Various studies have conceptualized professional identity differently, leading to an array of dimensions, including commitment to the profession of special education, beliefs about special education and inclusive practices, sense of competence and confidence in special education, emotional connection to the role of special education, and expected role and responsibilities in special education (Akerson et al., 2014; Hong, 2024; Alpaslan et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2020). To ensure comprehensive coverage and reflect the complexity of these relationships, we incorporated all the recognized dimensions of professional identity during the construction of our questionnaire. This approach was undertaken to determine which dimensions would be most salient and influential in the Kuwaiti context, as the cross-cultural applicability of these dimensions had not been previously established. Factor analysis was implemented to identify which dimensions held relevance for preservice special education teachers in Kuwait, with the goal of refining our understanding of professional identity within this specific educational and cultural environment.

Data Analysis

The raw data were analyzed employing version 23.0 of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Descriptive statistical analyses were performed, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. These analyses were used to examine participants' demographic information and dimensions of social support and professional identity. This research also used inferential statistical analyses, including correlation analysis, factor analysis, and regression analysis, to determine possible statistical comparisons and relationships between the total number of responses.

Results

Analysis of Social Support Dimensions

Table 3 shows descriptive statistics for different dimensions of social support that special education students received. The table outlines the students' perceptions towards the support being extended by teachers, family, and peers, including the levels of agreement on the statements and the statistical significance. The data includes mean scores, standard deviations, rankings, and *p*-values for each statement in relation to how different kinds of support are experienced and valued by students.

Table 3 :Descriptive Statistics of the Responses of Social Support Dimensions

Dimension	Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank	P Value
Support from Teachers	I can easily communicate with the members of the Special Education Department.	4.11	0.91	3	< .01
	I receive positive feedback on my progress in special education from the members of the Special Education Department	4.30	0.83	1	< .01
	I feel comfortable approaching members of the Special Education Department with questions or concerns related to special education	4.21	0.84	2	< .01
Support from Family	My family members support my decision to choose a teaching career in special education.	4.45	0.73	2	< .01
	I can openly discuss my academic concerns with my family members	4.26	0.94	4	< .01
	I can openly discuss my career concerns with my family members	4.28	0.92	3	< .01
	I receive encouragement from my family to succeed in my studies.	4.62	0.67	1	< .01
Support from Peers	I have friends in college whom I can rely on for help with my studies.	3.71	1.26	3	< .01
	I feel a sense of belonging with my friends in college.	3.83	1.12	2	< .01
	I collaborate with my friends on projects related to special education	4.21	0.88	1	< .01

Note. Std. Dev.= Standard Deviation.

The analysis of support from the Special Education Department reveals strong positive perceptions among students. The highest-rated statement, “I receive positive feedback on my progress,” achieved a mean score of 4.30 and an agreement rate of 86.4%, indicating that students felt highly encouraged by the feedback they received. Following closely, “I feel comfortable approaching members of the Special Education Department” had a mean score of 4.21 and an agreement rate of 81.6%, showing that students felt at ease seeking assistance. “I can easily communicate with members of the Special Education Department” ranked third, with a mean of 4.11 and a 76.4% agreement rate, reflecting good communication ease, although slightly lower than other aspects. All *p*-values were below .01, confirming that these findings were statistically significant.

Regarding family support, students agreed with many of the aspects. The highest in this regard was the statement “I receive encouragement from my family to succeed,” with an average score of 4.62 and an agreement rate of 93.2%, indicating the significance of encouragement from family members in academic success. The second-ranking statement was “My family supports my decision to pursue a teaching career in special education” with a mean score of 4.45 and an 89.6% agreement rate. The abilities to discuss career and academic concerns openly with the family scored high as well, with mean scores of 4.28 and 4.26, respectively.

Peer support was also essential but inconsistent in effectiveness. The highest-rated statement was “I collaborate with my friends on projects,” with a mean score of 4.21 and a significant agreement rate of 80.8%, reflecting strong collaborative effort. However, “I feel a sense of belonging with my friends” and “I have friends I can rely on for academic help” only reached the lower mean scores of 3.83 and 3.71, respectively, which indicates further development of peer relationships and support.

Analysis of Professional Identity Dimensions

This analysis investigates the following aspects of the professional identity among students pursuing careers in special education: commitment to the profession, views on inclusive practices, sense of competence and confidence, emotional connection to their role, and knowledge of their expected professional practice. Evaluation of those aspects provides insight into the level of commitment, competence, and values that an individual holds with regard to special education. Table 4 presents the mean scores, standard deviations, rankings, and statistical significance of responses to statements addressing these dimensions, highlighting the readiness and eagerness of students to play their future roles.

Table 4: *Descriptive Statistics of the Responses of Professional Identity Dimensions*

Dimension	Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank	<i>P</i> Value
Commitment to the Profession of Special Education	I am committed to pursuing a teaching career in special education	4.40	0.70	1	< .01
	I feel passionate about working with students with disabilities	4.30	0.84	2	< .01

Dimension	Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank	P Value
	Special education is the field in which I see myself working for a long time.	4.21	0.96	3	< .01
Beliefs about Special Education and Inclusive Practices	I believe that all students, regardless of their abilities, can learn and succeed.	4.47	0.71	2	< .01
	Teaching students with disabilities relies on understanding their educational needs	4.50	0.74	1	< .01
Sense of Competence and Confidence in Special Education	I believe in promoting inclusive environments (integration) where students with disabilities are supported.	4.28	0.83	3	< .01
	I believe that I can positively influence the academic development of students with disabilities.	4.34	0.69	2	< .01
	I am confident in my ability to collaborate with the parents of students with disabilities.	4.30	0.81	3	< .01
Emotional Connection to the Role of Special Education	I am confident in my ability to collaborate with other teachers in the field of special education.	4.46	0.65	1	< .01
	I am excited about the opportunity to make a meaningful difference in the lives of students with disabilities.	4.46	0.68	2	< .01
	Working in the field of special education provides me with a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction	4.52	0.64	1	< .01
Expected Role and Responsibilities in Special Education	I understand the ethical responsibilities and legal obligations of working in special education.	4.49	0.64	3	< .01
	I recognize the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive educational environment for students with disabilities.	4.55	0.62	2	< .01
	I am prepared to advocate for the rights and needs of students with disabilities within educational settings.	4.61	0.57	1	< .01

Students intending to join the special education field were highly committed, as shown by the high means they rated on items assessing commitment to the special education field (mean = 4.40), enthusiasm in working with students with disabilities (mean = 4.30), and long-term vision in their career (mean = 4.21). Such commitment shall, therefore, play a vital role in sustaining motivation and success. Students also strongly believed in inclusiveness: understanding students' educational needs (mean = 4.50), believing in the potential of all students to succeed (mean = 4.47), and fostering inclusive environments (mean = 4.28). This foundational perspective is central to their approach in special education. Students felt assured of their professional competencies: they felt capable of cooperating with other teachers (mean = 4.46), influencing the students in a positive way in their development (mean = 4.34), and working with their parents (mean = 4.30), which is crucial for effective teaching and collaboration. They also reported a significant emotional attachment to

their work in that they felt a strong thorough sense of accomplishment in their jobs (mean = 4.52) and were highly excited about making a meaningful impact (mean = 4.46). This emotional engagement enhances their job satisfaction and commitment. Students also felt well prepared with regard to their roles and responsibilities, with high scores reflecting their preparation for advocating for student rights (mean = 4.61), creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment (mean = 4.55), and knowledge of ethical and legal requirements (mean = 4.49).

Correlation Analysis

Table 5 shows the correlation analysis, which explores the relationships between three independent variables (Support from Teachers [ST], Support from Family [SF], and Support from Peers [SP]) and dependent variables (Commitment to the Profession of Special Education [CPSE], Beliefs about Special Education and Inclusive Practices [BSEIP], Sense of Competence and Confidence in Special Education [SCCSE], Emotional Connection to the Role of Special Education [ECRSE], and Expected Role and Responsibilities in Special Education [ERRSE]). The correlations were significant at the .01 level, indicating strong and meaningful relationships between each of these variables.

Table 5: *Correlation Matrix of Factors Influencing Special Education Students*

Var.	ST	SF	SP	CPSE	BSEIP	SCCSE	ECRSE	ERRSE
ST	1							
SF	.264**	1						
SP	.468**	.304**	1					
CPSE	.550**	.464**	.464**	1				
BSEIP	.267**	.420**	.222**	.378**	1			
SCCSE	.408**	.454**	.364**	.642**	.496**	1		
ECRSE	.485**	.499**	.406**	.685**	.468**	.742**	1	
ERRSE	.374**	.525**	.294**	.514**	.568**	.652**	.710**	1

Note. **. Correlation was significant at the .01 level (2-tailed). ST: Support from Teachers; SP: Support from Peers; SF: Support from Family; CPSE: Commitment to the Profession of Special Education; BSEIP: Beliefs about Special Education and Inclusive Practices; ECRSE: Emotional Connection to the Role of Special Education; SCCSE: Sense of Competence and Confidence in Special Education; ERRSE: Expected Role and Responsibilities in Special Education.

Table 5 reveals significant correlations among various factors influencing special education students. ST was strongly correlated with CPSE, with a correlation coefficient (r) of .550, underscoring the pivotal role of teacher support in nurturing career dedication. Similarly, SF also showed a strong correlation with CPSE (r = .464), highlighting how family encouragement reinforces professional commitment. SP, while also positively impacting CPSE (r = .464), had a slightly lesser impact compared with ST and SF.

The dependent variables—CPSE, BSEIP, SCCSE, ECRSE, and ERRSE—were all significantly influenced by these support systems. Notably, CPSE correlated strongly with SCCSE (r = .642), suggesting that commitment enhances confidence in one’s abilities. BSEIP moderately correlated with SCCSE (r = .496), indicating that a belief in inclusivity contributes to greater confidence. ECRSE showed the highest correlations with SCCSE (r = .742) and CPSE (r = .685), reflecting that emotional engagement significantly boosts both commitment and confidence. Additionally, ECRSE correlated strongly with ERRSE (r = .710), highlighting that emotional connection improves understanding and acceptance of professional responsibilities.

Factor Analysis

To gain a deeper understanding of the dimensions underlying professional identity in special education, a factor analysis was conducted. This analysis aimed to identify the core factors that contribute to how educators perceive and engage with their roles within the field. Using Principal Component Analysis (PCA), the analysis explored the variance explained by different factors, helping to distill the multifaceted nature of professional identity into more manageable dimensions. The results of this analysis are summarized in Table 6, which details the total variance explained by the extracted factors.

Table 6: *Total Variance Explained- Professional Identity Dimensions*

Factors	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	6.78	48.45	48.45	6.78	48.45	48.45	4.48	31.97	31.97
2	1.39	9.95	58.40	1.39	9.95	58.40	3.70	26.43	58.40

Note. Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 6 presents the total variance explained for the dimensions of professional identity through PCA. Two factors emerged, explaining 58.40% of the variance. The first factor, with an initial eigenvalue of 6.78, accounted for 48.45% of the variance but dropped to 31.97% after rotation. The second factor, initially explaining 9.95% of the variance, increased to 26.43% post-rotation. This rotation helped in better distributing the explained variance across the two factors, enhancing their interpretability. Together, these two factors captured a substantial portion of the variance, indicating that they represent key dimensions of professional identity in special education.

Table 7: Rotated Component Matrix

Statements	Factors	
	1	2
I feel passionate about working with students with disabilities	0.841	
Special education is the field in which I see myself working for a long time.	.802	
I am committed to pursuing a teaching career in special education	.800	
Working in the field of special education provides me with a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction	.730	
I believe that I can positively influence the academic development of students with disabilities.	.693	
I am confident in my ability to collaborate with the parents of students with disabilities.	.639	
I am excited about the opportunity to make a meaningful difference in the lives of students with disabilities.	.596	
Teaching students with disabilities relies on understanding their educational needs.		.763
I recognize the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive educational environment for students with disabilities.		.691
I understand the ethical responsibilities and legal obligations of working in special education.		.676
I believe that all students, regardless of their abilities, can learn and succeed.		.665
I am prepared to advocate for the rights and needs of students with disabilities within educational settings.		.617
I am confident in my ability to collaborate with other teachers in the field of special education.		.530
I believe in promoting inclusive environments (integration) where students with disabilities are supported.		.471

Table 7 displays the rotated component matrix, identifying two main dimensions of professional identity in special education:

1. Commitment and Passion for Special Education: This factor comprises items related to emotional commitment, passion, and personal satisfaction in the field.

2. Beliefs and Ethical Understanding in Special Education: This factor includes ethical responsibilities, inclusive practices, and understanding required for effective teaching.

In the Kuwaiti context, these factors condense from the original five dimensions of professional identity—commitment, beliefs about inclusive practices, competence and confidence, emotional connection, and expected roles and responsibilities—into two broader factors. Together, both factors reflect the core aspects of professional identity within special education, focusing on both personal commitment and a deep understanding of the ethical and inclusive principles of the profession. This underlines how emotional engagement and ethical understanding exert their impact on educators’ professional identity in this context. Therefore, such findings suggest that professional development in Kuwait should emphasize both the emotional and ethical dimensions of educators’ professional identity in order to further enhance their effectiveness and satisfaction.

Regression Analysis

Effect of Social Support on Commitment and Passion for Special Education

A regression analysis was conducted to further investigate the effect of social support on educators’ commitment and passion towards special education. This analysis aimed to quantify how support from teachers, family, and peers contributes to these key factors of professional identity. Table 8 provides a summary of the regression model.

Table 8: *Model Summary of the Effect of Social Support on Commitment and Passion for Special Education*

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.686	.470	.464	0.444

The model summary shows that the multiple regression model, which included support from teachers, family, and peers as predictors, explained 47% of the variance in Commitment and Passion for Special Education ($R^2 = .470$). The adjusted R^2 of .464 indicates that the model remained strong even when adjusted for the number of predictors. The standard error of 0.444 suggests a moderate level of prediction error, suggesting that while the model captured a substantial portion of the variance, some variability was unaccounted for by the predictors.

Table 9: *ANOVA of the Effect of Social Support on Commitment and Passion for Special Education*

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
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Regression	42.97	3	14.32		
Residual	48.43	246	0.20	72.77	< .001
Total	91.40	249			

The results of ANOVA confirm that the regression model was a significant predictor of Commitment and Passion for Special Education, with an F-value of 72.77 and a p -value of less than .001. This indicates that support from teachers, family, and peers all put together exerts a significant effect on students' commitment and passion in the field.

Table 10:Regression Analysis of Social Support Predicting Commitment and Passion for Special Education

Independent Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.020	0.234		4.36	< .001
Support from Teachers	0.314	0.045	0.367	6.91	< .001
Support from Family	0.360	0.048	0.368	7.48	< .001
Support from Peers	0.111	0.034	0.174	3.23	.001

The regression analysis shows that Support from Family ($B = 0.360$, $\beta = 0.368$, $p < .001$) had the greatest impact on Commitment and Passion for Special Education, followed closely by Support from Teachers ($B = 0.314$, $\beta = 0.367$, $p < .001$). Support from Peers ($B = 0.111$, $\beta = 0.174$, $p = .001$) also had a significant, though smaller, effect. All of these three types of support significantly influence students' commitment and passion for the field.

Effect of Social Support on Beliefs and Ethical Understanding in Special Education

Understanding the effect of social support on educators' beliefs and ethical understanding is crucial in special education. Social support from teachers, family, and peers plays a significant role in shaping educators' professional perspectives and ethical practices. This analysis explores how different sources of social support influence beliefs and ethical understanding within the context of special education.

Table 11:Model Summary of the Effect of Social Support on Beliefs and Ethical Understanding in Special Education

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.603	.363	.356	0.376

Table 11 shows the model summary of the regression analysis assessing the impact of social support on educators' beliefs and ethical understanding. The results indicate a moderate-to-strong relationship, with an R-value of .603, suggesting a positive correlation between social support and the dependent variables. The R^2 value of .363 indicates that approximately 36.3% of the variance in beliefs and ethical

understanding can be explained by social support. The adjusted R^2 of .356 also confirms the stability of the model after accounting for the number of predictors. Further, the standard error of the estimate was 0.376, reflecting the average deviation of the observed values from the predicted values. This model provides valuable insights into the role of social support in influencing educators' professional and ethical development in special education.

Table 12: ANOVA of the Effect of Social Support on Beliefs and Ethical Understanding in Special Education

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	19.86	3	6.62	46.80	< .001
Residual	34.80	246	0.14		
Total	54.66	249			

The ANOVA results confirm that the model predicting Beliefs and Ethical Understanding in Special Education based on social support was statistically significant. The F-value of 46.80 with a p -value of < .001 indicates that social support from teachers, family, and peers significantly influences beliefs and ethical understanding. The model explained a significant portion of the variance, with the Regression Sum of Squares at 19.86 and Residual Sum of Squares at 34.80, demonstrating that social support variables are a robust predictor of beliefs and ethical understanding in this context.

Table 13: Regression Analysis of Social Support Predicting Beliefs and Ethical Understanding in Special Education

Independent Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.17	0.20		10.92	< .001
Support from Teachers	0.15	0.04	0.226	3.90	< .001
Support from Family	0.35	0.04	0.460	8.52	< .001
Support from Peers	0.04	0.03	0.080	1.36	.175

The regression analysis results reveal the influence of social support on Beliefs and Ethical Understanding in Special Education. Support from Family had the most significant effect, with a standardized coefficient of 0.460 and a significant t -value (8.52, $p < .001$), indicating it is the strongest predictor of beliefs and ethical understanding. Also, Support from Teachers significantly influenced these beliefs, with a coefficient of 0.226 and a t -value of 3.90 ($p < .001$). However, Support from Peers had a very small effect, with a coefficient of 0.080 and a non-significant t -value (1.36, $p = .175$). The constant value suggests a strong baseline level of beliefs and ethical understanding independent of social support.

Discussion and Conclusion

This discussion aligns the research questions with the results and provides a comprehensive analysis supported by relevant literature.

1- What types of social support are available to preservice special education teachers during their College Education?

The findings show that preservice special education teachers receive varying levels of support from teachers, family, and peers. Table 3 demonstrates that students perceive strong support from their Special Education Department, family, and peers. The support from the Special Education Department is characterized by positive feedback, approachability, and effective communication. This aligns with the literature suggesting that teacher support is crucial for academic success and professional development (Lei et al., 2018).

Family support is also highly rated, with very high levels of agreement for both enabling encouragement and providing career support. For instance, students reported that their families provide substantial encouragement in helping them to succeed in their studies. This reflects the findings that family support plays a key role in encouraging academic persistence and success (Permatasari et al., 2021).

Less consistency was observed in the support provided by peers. While students felt relatively positive about collaborating with friends on projects, feelings of belonging and academic support from peers were relatively lower. Such variability underscores the importance of enhancing peer networks to ensure a more consistently supportive environment. The quality and consistency of peer relationships, although important for the attainment of both academic and emotional support (Putri and Nursanti, 2020), can vary.

2- What are the key dimensions of professional identity among preservice special education teachers in Kuwait?

One of the most significant findings of this research is that, according to factor analysis, there are only two key dimensions of professional identity that are relevant to preservice special education teachers in Kuwait. Although the initial theoretical framework incorporated multiple dimensions of professional identity, reflecting the diversity in the academic literature, our empirical analysis revealed that only two dimensions were statistically significant in the Kuwaiti context. This result emphasizes the importance of contextualizing theoretical models to local contexts. While professional identity is a well-studied construct, the dimensions recognized in broader international research may not fully reflect the sociocultural realities of different regions. The reduction of dimensions to those that are most meaningful within Kuwait highlights the necessity of localized validation in educational research. Mainly two professional identity dimensions were identified by factor analysis: Commitment and Passion for Special Education, and Beliefs and Ethical Understanding in Special Education. The reduction from five dimensions into two broad factors highlights the core aspects of professional identity in the Kuwaiti context. Such consolidation reflects the cultural emphasis on personal commitment

and ethical understanding, aligning with local educational values (Soydaş, 2020). By acknowledging and nurturing these two key aspects, the educational institutions in Kuwait will be better placed to support special education teachers in developing a strong and multi-faceted professional identity, which also enhances their effectiveness and job satisfaction accordingly.

3- What is the correlation between social support (from teachers, family, and peers) and the professional identity of preservice special education teachers in Kuwait?

The results of this study reveal significant correlations between social support (from teachers, family, and peers) and the professional identity of preservice special education teachers in Kuwait. The analysis demonstrates that social support plays a pivotal role in shaping key aspects of professional identity, such as commitment to the profession, confidence, and emotional connection to the role. Specifically, teacher support exhibited the strongest correlation with professional identity dimensions, as shown by the correlation coefficient. This finding aligns with prior research, which highlights the fundamental influence of teacher mentorship and institutional backing on career development in special education (Lei et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2020).

The robust relationship between teacher support and professional identity suggests that the emotional and academic guidance provided by faculty members is integral to preservice teachers' sense of belonging and efficacy within the profession. Teachers act as role models, not only providing knowledge but also reinforcing self-confidence and resilience in the face of the unique challenges associated with working in special education. This connection is critical, as previous studies have also noted the influence of institutional support on fostering a strong professional identity (Alpaslan et al., 2023).

Similarly, family support demonstrated a strong correlation with professional identity, reinforcing the notion that emotional and moral encouragement from family members significantly influences career aspirations and long-term dedication to the field of special education. Family members play a critical role in endorsing career decisions, which, in turn, nurtures the intrinsic motivation and resilience necessary for teachers to succeed in this demanding profession. This finding echoes studies that emphasize the role of familial support in academic persistence and career satisfaction (Permatasari et al., 2021).

The relationship between peer support and professional identity, while statistically significant, was comparatively weaker than the impact of teacher and family support. Although peers provide valuable collaboration and shared experiences, their role in shaping a deep, emotionally grounded professional identity may be less pronounced. These findings suggest that while peers are important for fostering a sense of community, the more structured and authoritative support from teachers and the emotional stability provided by family appear to play a larger role in developing a strong professional identity.

Overall, these findings underscore the importance of multi-dimensional support networks—particularly from teachers and family—in reinforcing preservice teachers' professional identities, which is crucial for long-term success and retention in the special education field. The high correlation values observed between social support and professional identity dimensions suggest that institutional efforts to enhance teacher mentorship, along with family involvement, could significantly bolster the professional development of special education teachers.

3- To what extent does social support (from teachers, family, and peers) predict professional commitment and emotional resilience among preservice special education teachers in Kuwait?

The results of the regression analysis illustrate how social support influences key dimensions of professional identity in special education. Family support is the strongest predictor of commitment and passion regarding the special education field, followed by teacher support. The impact of support from peers, while still significant, is comparatively smaller.

The predictive power of family support in this context is noteworthy, as it suggests that the emotional and psychological backing provided by family members directly contributes to teachers' ability to remain committed to the profession, particularly in stressful and challenging educational environments. The findings reflect the importance of emotional stability provided by family members, which fosters both persistence and resilience, echoing Bacakoğlu's (2018) findings on the central role of family support in career development. Support from family and peers significantly contributes to students' emotional well-being and stress management. These findings generally align with the general body of literature on the mitigating role of social support on academic stress and the promotion of resilience among students (Hong, 2024; Lei et al., 2018).

Teacher support, while slightly less predictive than family support, remains a critical factor in shaping both professional commitment and resilience. Teachers and mentors in the preservice training environment provide not only academic guidance but also emotional and motivational support, which directly influences teachers' engagement with the profession. This strong connection between teacher support and emotional resilience reinforces the idea that mentors play a pivotal role in helping teachers navigate the emotional challenges inherent in the field of special education, echoing earlier studies that highlight the impact of positive teacher-student interactions on career aspirations (Aykaç et al., 2017; Chen et al., 2020; Zhang & Guo, 2023). Teachers who are given consistent, constructive feedback and mentorship are better equipped to cope with the stresses of their profession and are more likely to remain dedicated to their roles.

Although peer support was also a significant predictor, its influence on professional commitment and resilience was notably weaker compared to teacher and family support. This finding suggests that while peers provide a valuable support

network, particularly for collaboration and social integration, their impact on fostering deep, emotional resilience and long-term commitment is less substantial. This lower predictive power may be due to the transient and less authoritative nature of peer relationships in comparison to the enduring influence of family and the formal guidance from teachers. The predictive role of social support on professional commitment and emotional resilience underscores the importance of creating robust support systems for preservice teachers

To conclude, the results underscore the importance of a multifaceted support system for preservice special education teachers. Support from teachers, family, and peers significantly influences professional identity, career aspirations, and resilience. The findings suggest that strengthening these support networks, particularly familial and institutional support, is crucial for fostering dedicated and resilient professionals in special education. This comprehensive support approach aligns with the literature and highlights the need for continuous reinforcement of support structures to enhance the effectiveness and satisfaction of future educators.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, several practical recommendations can be made to enhance support systems for preservice special education teachers, thereby improving their professional development:

- **Enhance Teacher Support:** Improve mentorship, feedback, and communication within Special Education Departments to better support preservice teachers' professional development.
- **Engage Family Support:** Develop programs that actively involve and support families, as their encouragement significantly impacts students' commitment and passion for their careers.
- **Strengthen Peer Networks:** Create structured peer support systems and collaborative opportunities to foster a more consistent and supportive academic environment.

Further Studies

Building on the insights gained from this study, future research could explore:

- **Long-term Effects of Social Support:** Investigate the impact of social support on the career trajectories of special education teachers.
- **Impact of Diverse Types of Social Support:** Examine how different types of social support (e.g., emotional vs. material support) influence various aspects of professional identity.
- **Comparative Studies of Teacher Preparation Programs:** Conduct studies to identify best practices among different teacher preparation programs for fostering supportive environments.

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